

# Queensland *news* Seagrass-Watch

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**Welcome** to the Summer 2000 edition of the Seagrass-Watch Newsletter. Seagrass-Watch now has a logo!! Over 50 entries were received from throughout Queensland. The official winners are Kelly



Blacklock and Lana Jeffery from Yarrilee State School in Hervey Bay. The graphic designers *Two Dogs Barking* (Cairns) developed the final logo based on the winning entries. The logo includes: seagrass (represented by *H. ovalis* because it is found around the entire Australian coastline); water (represented by a wave); a human element (in this case an eye); and the text is in the hand writing of Leonardo da Vinci.



Lana Jeffery and Kelly Blacklock show off their winning design to Stuart Campbell, Len McKenzie and Moyra McRae..

## **Taking Seagrass-Watch to the world**

Len McKenzie's (MPEG) presentation to 136 of the world's top seagrass scientists on the Seagrass-Watch program at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Seagrass Biology Workshop in Corsica, France, was a resounding success. Len spoke on how community-based monitoring in Hervey Bay, Great Sandy Strait and the Whitsundays has evolved and is addressing issues regarding the status and health of seagrass meadows. The talk generated immense interest in the community-based monitoring forum to be held in Hervey Bay in October 2001 (see Issue 5).



The longest known seagrass 7.3m in length has recently been reported from Funakoshi Bay, Japan.



## **Rivers of the Range**

On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October students, teachers and parents from EASTS Homegroup at Yarrilee State school Hervey Bay, travelled to Maleny for the Rivers of the Range Congress. The congress celebrated the positive outcomes that young people are achieving within their communities for their catchments.



EASTS Homegroup and teacher Ms Wendy Jones.

The students presented an oral report and exhibition on seagrasses and seagrass monitoring. This was the result of their Mary River Estuary Research and their work with Seagrass-Watch and the Hervey Bay Dugong and Seagrass Monitoring Program. They also ran an interactive workshop called "Turtle Hurdles". The students' contributions were successful as they had wonderful feedback. They won the \$100 prize for "Best Workshop Facilitation - Coastal Issues", sponsored by the Hervey Bay City Council, a Hollow Log Home Wildlife Box for the school and a family pass to Underwater World.

## **Seagrass-Watch year 2001 Calendar**

Year 2001 calendar refills are currently being distributed to all Seagrass-Watch volunteers. The desktop calendar serves not only as a colourful addition to your desktop but also provides a means for you to record observations (eg *washed up seagrass on local beach, dugong sighted, fruits/flowers sighted etc*). If you require a replacement plastic holder or haven't received a calendar before and would like one, contact either the local co-ordinator in your area or the Seagrass-Watch Coordinator.

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An adult dugong can eat upwards of 25kg wet weight of seagrass a day.

# Hervey Bay Happenings!

## Hervey Bay Seafood festival

This years Hervey Bay Seafood Festival (15th October) was a great success and allowed the Hervey Bay Dugong and Seagrass Monitoring Program to show the great work it has been doing for *Seagrass-Watch*. Members of the group educated and discussed issues with interested locals. Over 300 people visited the group's tent and 60 new people signed up to receive the *Seagrass-Watch* newsletter.



*Seagrass-Watchers from left; John Roberts, Lynn Robertson and John Lindberg eager to discuss seagrass issues.*

The Festival provided the opportunity for a diverse range of people to present their views and products to the community. Of particular interest was a stall honouring the past fishers who lived in the Hervey Bay region. Historical photographs provided an opportunity to view past fishing practices. Outlawed practices such as dugong fishing remind us of the cultural change that programs like *Seagrass-Watch* are working towards, aiming to raise awareness and protect the habitats upon which fish, dugongs and turtles depend.



*Seagrass-Watch gets a helping hand from the great man himself "King Neptune" who pronounced the program " a great winner for all sea-life concerned".*

## Long-term monitoring in Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Straits

Twenty six sites were surveyed across the region in November 2000. Seagrasses at Urangan and Wanggoolba Creek continue to recover with higher abundance (20-50% cover) of *Zostera capricorni* and *Halophila ovalis* found during November 2000 than during August 2000 surveys (< 1% cover). *Seagrass-Watch* data will provide an ongoing record on the rate of this recovery.



*Wendy Jones and one of the many local school children who helped "create a dugong" and contribute to awareness raising of their importance..*

## Next Trip To Hervey Bay

The Marine Plant Ecology Group will be joining the locals to monitor the permanent sites in Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait from 6 - 11<sup>th</sup> February 2001.

## Good tides for Seagrass-Watch

Hervey Bay (Burnett Heads)

February 6-11

Lowest tide (0.47) on Saturday 10 February at 4.38 pm.



# Whitsunday Wanderings!

## Whitsunday's monitoring

Volunteers have continued to make a significant contribution to the monitoring of newly established sites in the Whitsundays. During September, 13 intertidal sites were monitored in the region.



Margaret and Siwan monitoring Midgeton sites.

Trends in seagrass abundance are emerging and are providing an excellent understanding of the ecology of seagrass meadows in Queensland.

At Pioneer Bay, Margaret and Amanda Parr were joined by about 10 volunteers to monitor the 4 sites. The data they are collecting is proving to be one of most consistent datasets with marked seasonal trends being shown. Concern was voiced by the volunteers over the persistence of filamentous algae covering seagrasses at Pioneer Bay. The situation appeared so serious that they invited the local mayor (Mario deMartini) to visit the site and witness for himself the poor environmental condition of these meadows. The meeting between volunteers and the mayor was aimed at finding solutions to reduce the growth of these algae and protect these important seagrasses.

Local resident Jean Wells is again tackling the Dingo Beach sites, and hopefully Joyce will be back after December. Brett Goudy again worked the Hideaway Bay sites helped by David Gail. The Wenzler family and Cate Radcliff "battled the mud" at the northern Midge Point sites and Pam Fountain took her turn at Laguna Quays as part of John & Tracey Thornton's "Marina team".



Jennifer, Paul & Andrew Wenzler monitoring Midge Point sites.

## Laguna Quays airport

Controversy has arisen over the development of the Laguna Quays Airport and its potential impact on



coastal habitats and wildlife. In its capacity as local "eyes" on the coast, Seagrass-Watch has provided relevant

information to all interested groups so that the impacts on the marine environment associated with the airport development are more clearly understood. Seagrass-Watch sites in the area will be monitored with great interest.

## Subtidal monitoring sites



OUCH divers monitored the 15 subtidal spots at Cid Harbour and the 2 sites at Whitehaven Beach showed that the seagrasses were following a typical spring time increase in growth at both locations, although anchors continue to damage seagrasses at Whitehaven Beach. The data suggests that anchors have a persistent effect on seagrass growth, but recovery may be possible if appropriate management strategies are introduced to limit anchor damage. The study has implications for other areas in the Whitsundays prone to heavy boat usage where anchors are used in soft sediments where seagrasses grow.

## Next trip to the Whitsundays



Surveys in the Whitsundays from the 9 to 14<sup>th</sup> December, will include sites in Pioneer Bay, Repulse Bay, Midgeton, Dingo Beach and Hideaway Bay. OUCH will survey Whitehaven Beach and Cid Harbour on Whitsunday Island.

## Good tides for Seagrass-Watch

Lowest tide (Shute Harbour) (0.69m) is on Tuesday December 12 at 5.47 pm, but the Whitsunday Volunteers at Pioneer Bay are again going to do a dawn survey to catch the best low tides for the month.



# Queensland Seagrass-Watch *news* continued ..

## **First year monitoring report**

The draft report of the first year of monitoring findings is currently being prepared. Preliminary findings indicate that seagrass growth patterns are very differently between Hervey Bay and the Whitsundays. Local monitoring is vital towards understanding the seasonal nature of seagrass meadows. The first report of the overall findings will be finalised early in the new year.

## **Seed bank studies**

Sampling for *Halodule uninervis* seeds was undertaken at Hervey Bay in November. Seeds were either absent or rare at most sites examined. This may imply that all seeds have germinated and little or no seeds are left in the seed bank.

## **Seagrass-Watch in far north Queensland**

Driven by local community interest *Seagrass-Watch's* preliminary ventures into northern Queensland, continued in October and November. At both Yule



Point (30 km north of Cairns) and Shelley Beach (10 km north of Townsville) seagrass cover increased between July and November.

Continuation and development of the program in the region will depend on the success of the application currently being assessed in Canberra.

## **Community Consultation Conference : Making community consultation work**

On October 13 Stuart attended a 3 day workshop on "Community Consultation" in Townsville. He had the opportunity to discuss *Seagrass-Watch* with others who work with communities in the development of programs to raise awareness of

environmental issues. Of particular interest was the support and interest of local fishermen and traditional owners for programs such as *Seagrass-Watch*. Discussions with representatives from *Sunfish* and traditional owners will be crucial to developing the *Seagrass-Watch* into a state-wide based program.

## **Community perceptions**

In November Leigh Bulkeley, a student from the School of International Training in Battleboro, Vermont, USA, joined *Seagrass-Watch* in Hervey Bay to gain insight into grass-roots community based environmental work. Leigh is a 3rd year university student and chose *Seagrass-Watch* as her case study to examine community perceptions about how the program was achieving individual and community goals and also assess how community action can help promote environmental awareness. We intend to report on the findings of her studies next year.



## **<sup>15</sup>N samples**

Results of the seagrass tissue samples taken for nitrogen isotope (<sup>15</sup>N) analysis from both regions in June and July are yet to be finalised. Findings from this study will be announced next year.

## **Do you want to get Involved?**

Contact your local *Seagrass-Watch* representatives:

### Hervey Bay:

Jerry Comans (Hervey Bay Dugong and Seagrass Monitoring Program) Ph. (07) 4124 2393

### Great Sandy Strait:

Steve Winderlich (QPWS Maryborough) Ph. (07) 4121 1933

### Whitsundays:

Margaret Parr (Whitsunday Volunteers Association) Airlie Beach Ph. (07) 4946 4996

Tony Fontes (Order of Underwater Coral Heroes Volunteers) Airlie Beach Ph. (07) 4946 7435



Any comments or suggestions about the *Seagrass-Watch* program would be greatly appreciated.

NEXT ISSUE OUT MARCH 2001

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